



White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders August 2010 Newsletter, Volume 1, Issue 1

Welcome to the first newsletter from the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders! It has been an exciting few months for the Initiative as we built our staff and introduced our work through various events within the community and federal agencies. We look forward to keeping you updated on our activities and the work of our federal partners.

Activities Update

- **President Barack Obama announces appointment of Daphne Kwok to serve as Chair of the President's Advisory Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders on Monday, July 26.** Ms. Kwok's more than two decades of experience as a community leader at both the national and state levels makes her an invaluable asset to the Commission. "Daphne knows what services and protections Asian American and Pacific Islanders need and what resources they can bring to the table to build a strong collaboration with the Obama Administration," said Initiative Executive Director Kiran Ahuja. Ms. Kwok currently serves as Executive Director of Asians and Pacific Islanders with Disabilities of California.
- **Interagency Working Group Meeting** – On July 21, we kicked off the first Interagency Working Group (IWG) meeting. The IWG came together to set the direction for implementing the Executive Order and share the work that we are currently doing with the AAPI community. A total of 28 senior officials and their staff were in attendance, representing numerous executive branch departments, agencies, and offices. As White House Office of Public Engagement Director Tina Tchen remarked, "The IWG is a model of working through all of the agencies and truly embedding change and transformation in the way the federal government approaches our communities." The work that we formally began is the start of a long-term partnership between the federal government and the AAPI communities.



Commission Chair Daphne Kwok and Initiative Co-Chair and Dept. of Education Secretary Arne Duncan (Image Credit: Teng Yang, White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders)



From Left: Labor Secretary Hilda Solis, Initiative Co-Chairs Commerce Secretary Gary Locke and Education Secretary Arne Duncan, Assistant to the President and Cabinet Secretary Chris Lu, and Initiative Executive Director, Kiran Ahuja (Image Credit: Teng Yang, White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders)

Read more about the IWG meeting in an update from Co-Chairs, Commerce Secretary Gary Locke and Education Secretary Arne Duncan [here](#).

- **AAPIs and the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act** - The Initiative is working on ensuring Asian American and Pacific Islander communities are aware of the implications of the passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA). The Initiative held a joint conference call with the White House Office of Public Engagement and the Department of Health and Human Services on July 29th on the impact of the ACA on AAPI communities. Senior Administration officials answered questions and provided an overview of the Affordable Care Act including preventive health benefits, minority health and health disparities provisions, and resources most relevant to AAPI communities.

- **Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month** – in May, the Initiative launched a “[What You Should Know About Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders](#)” campaign within the federal government. The campaign aimed to raise the profile of AAPIs by increasing communication and access between federal agencies and AAPI communities. During the last few months, the Initiative has partnered with the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Labor, and Transportation, and the Small Business Administration/Minority Business Development Agency to host a series of **roundtable discussions** on educational attainment, health disparities, housing,

jobs, community and economic development, and workers issues. Community organizations shared **innovative models of success** and provided policy recommendations to federal agencies. Additionally, the Initiative enlisted Administration officials from across the executive branch to **conduct site visits across the country** in an effort to broaden AAPI community engagement. Finally, the Initiative held a press conference and a number of one-on-one interviews with ethnic and international media to promote the launch, including outlets as far as Australia and New Zealand, in which interviews focused on our efforts to engage the Pacific Islander community.

- **On May 24, 2010, President Barack Obama hosted a reception at the White House** celebrating AAPI Heritage Month. Father Vien Nguyen of the Mary Queen of Viet Nam Church in New Orleans East, introduced President Obama. After the introduction, President Obama praised Father Vien Nguyen for serving after Hurricane Katrina, “...not only as a spiritual advisor but also as a community organizer, making sure his parishioners got the help that they needed.” Since the BP oil spill began, Father Vien has been working with Vietnamese and other Southeast Asian American fishermen in



Labor Secretary Hilda Solis hosts a roundtable with the White House Initiative on AAPIs and community leaders on issues facing AAPI workers (Image Credit: Department of Labor)



Education Secretary and Initiative Co-Chair Arne Duncan visits Quincy Elementary in Boston's Chinatown (Image Credit: Department of Education)



Father Vien Nguyen and President Obama (Image Credit: White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders)

the Gulf Coast to ensure that their needs are met. Watch the video [here](#), and read the rest of President Obama's remarks from the reception [here](#).

- **BP Gulf Oil Spill Response** – Following the BP oil spill, the Initiative received complaints regarding inadequate language translation services in the relief efforts for the thousands of Southeast Asian Americans in the Gulf Coast. Southeast Asian Americans comprise one-third of the seafood industry workforce, as commercial licensed fishers, oysterfolk, crabbers, shrimpers, boat welders, and seafood processors. The oil spill's disruption of the seafood industry threatens the livelihoods of an estimated 80% of Southeast Asian American families in the region. The Initiative dispatched staff to Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama to assess the immediate needs and provide recommendations to the federal agencies and Unified Area Command. Assessments revealed lack of information and coordination of language translation and interpretation services seafood industry workers encountered along the Gulf Coast, where they struggle with limited-English proficiency, poverty and low literacy - now compounded by the loss of income and livelihood.

The Administration is working to proactively address language access and other pressing issues through the Deepwater Integrated Services Team, an interagency working group headed by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, responsible for coordinating federal resources to those affected by the BP oil spill. The Initiative serves as co-lead of the Language Accessibility Subgroup, which spearheaded a **centralized Federal-wide system providing multiple language translations** for oil spill relief efforts in the [United Area Command \(UAC\)](#) and distributing these materials to impacted communities. Read about the Initiative's work and experiences in the Gulf Coast [here](#).

Get Involved! Please email WhiteHouseAAPI@ed.gov to find out how to help the Gulf Coast AAPI communities.

- **Meet our Summer Interns!**

Ashley Cheri is a recent graduate of California State University-Fullerton (CSUF) where she received her Bachelor's of Science degree in Health Science. Ashley has been active in the AAPI community through her work on education policy and programs on behalf of Pacific Islander students. She is passionate about students and education, and hopes to continue her work with Pacific Islander students in the future. Ashley will return to CSUF in the



Bilingual Vessels of Opportunity safety training for Vietnamese Americans who will assist with the oil spill clean-up efforts in Chauvin, LA (Image Credit: White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders)



Bilingual town hall meeting with Vietnamese American fishers, their families and community leaders impacted by the oil spill in D'Iberville, MS (Image Credit: White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders)



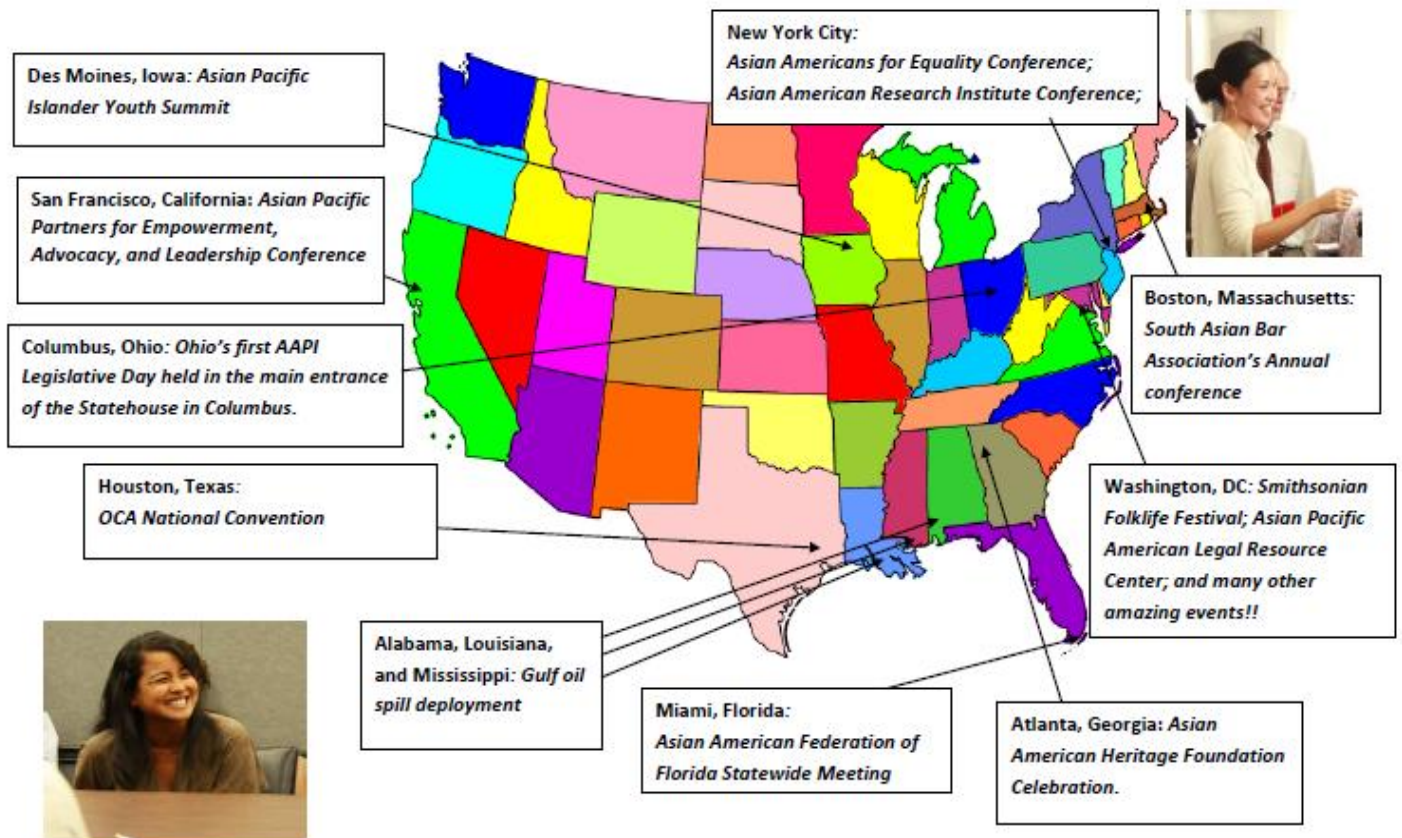
From left to right, Ashley Cheri, Laura Nolan and Teng Yang (Image Credit: White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders)

fall to pursue a Master's degree in Higher Education. This summer Ashley is working on Pacific Islander community outreach for the Initiative, assisting with the facilitation of the federal Interagency Working Group, and helping to enhance the Initiative's social media presence.

Laura Nolan is a rising senior at Scripps College, pursuing a dual major in History and American Studies. Laura works with the Scripps College Academy, a nationally recognized college access program as a summer program facilitator and mentor/tutor. Laura has developed garden and food justice-centered workshops at a transitional home for women recently released from prison; worked on a campaign to mobilize Los Angeles students around issues of educational equity, access to public transportation, and community rights; and coordinated a tutoring/mentoring program at two underserved high schools. At the Initiative, Laura is researching urban gardening and sustainable living, educational disparities within the AAPI community, and rebuilding infrastructure in communities devastated by the BP oil spill.

Teng Yang is a 1.5 generation Hmong American student who came to America as a refugee in 1993, settling in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He and his family's refugee experience continue to inspire him to always recognize the needs of the underserved. Teng will be a senior in the fall at Brown University, studying Ethnic Studies. On campus, he is active with the performing arts community, participating in major theater productions and an a capella group called the *Brown University Jabberwocks*. Off campus, he enjoys being young and able to idealistically talk with his peers about social change. As an intern with the Initiative, he is focusing on language access and health issues.

Some places we've visited... (and, on the horizon, Hawai'i in October!)



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